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PLEASE DON'T TOUCH THE ART!

Security and Public Access in Art Museums

Michael Seary

AGNS

Art Gallery of Nova Scotia

About the Photographs

Most of the images used in this publication are drawn from the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia collection. One exception is on p.17 showing children in front of an Egyptian statue at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. This was taken by the author. The other exception, *Six guards and other Staff at the Royal Ontario Museum, 1914*, seen on p.6 and also in part as the cover design, is used with permission from and thanks to the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto.

The painting shown on the front cover is *The Fruit Dance*, studio of Peter Paul Rubens and Frans Snyders, c. 1616–1617, oil on canvas, 130.0 x 180.0 cm. On loan to the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia from Farhad Vladi, Halifax, Nova Scotia.

PLEASE DON'T TOUCH THE ART
SECURITY AND PUBLIC ACCESS IN ART MUSEUMS
Michael Seary

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AGNS

Commissionaires

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Director's Introduction

The mission of the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia (AGNS) is to bring art and people together. Our staff works relentlessly to achieve this goal. But ensuring the accessibility of our collection also entails assurance of the security of both the collection and the visitors to the Gallery.

The role of security is carried out at AGNS by the Canadian Corps of Commissionaires whose staff is assigned to the Gallery on a continuing basis. Since the goals of accessibility and security are not always compatible there sometimes is a 'creative tension' between Security and AGNS staff (or occasionally between Security and the public).

THE DOMINION BUILDING, HALIFAX, CANADA, C1890
LATER BECAME THE ART GALLERY OF NOVA SCOTIA
PHOTO COURTESY PUBLIC ARCHIVES OF NOVA SCOTIA

In the fall of 1993 Michael Seary came to us as a senior art educator and administrator to carry out on a part time basis a program of art classes for children and families. He was literally well placed to appreciate the need for both security and accessibility since, when he started, the classes were held right in the gallery spaces while the public was looking at the art and Security was ensuring that it was not at risk of damage.

In 1994 Michael was given the title of Security Liaison Officer and the mandate to ensure the smoothest relationship possible between AGNS staff, our visitors, and the Security personnel. This brief publication summarizes how he has worked to do that.

Thank you, Michael, for your concern and diligence in providing us and galleries everywhere with a comprehensive guide to being 'secure in the Gallery'. Thank you to our Security detail for the excellent service they provide to the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, the Province of Nova Scotia, and our visitors.

This publication would not have been possible without the financial assistance of the Canadian Corps of Commissionaires. Thank you Commandant Tom Haney, for your insight and generosity. We are most grateful.

With good wishes.

Bernard Riordon
Director
Art Gallery of Nova Scotia

Canadian Corps of Commissionaires

Nova Scotia Division

The Canadian Corps of Commissionaires is a unique organization that can trace its origins back to the Crimean War when British soldiers, some of whom were maimed, were simply thrown out on the streets after service to their country. For nearly 150 years, the Corps of Commissionaires has fulfilled its mission "to find worthy employment for former servicemen".

Nova Scotia Division has been active since 1938 and Commissionaires have become a familiar sight across the province, from Cape Smokey to Yarmouth. In 2001, approximately 1,150 Commissionaires proudly wear their Corps uniform and continue to display those attributes which have earned them the respect of their fellow citizens and Corps clients. No longer just security guards, Commissionaires act as couriers, computer operators, toll booth operators, fingerprint specialists, by-law enforcement officers and a myriad of other responsible and challenging positions. High quality personnel, superior training, low turnover rate and dependable work record ensure that Commissionaire services are constantly in demand.

The Nova Scotia Division has been proud to provide security services for the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia since 1975, and is particularly pleased to have sponsored the exhibit, Commissionaires' Choice, described on page 29.

Colonel T.P. Haney
CEO/Commandant

Public Educational Programs

There has always been a close link between the AGNS programming department and the security services provided by the AGNS unit of the Corps of Commissionaires. This link is especially important because we offer programs to children and their families—and are eager that our gallery be seen as a welcoming place for them. At the same time we wish the children to learn about the need for security and the ways it is achieved. Children of course can be very exuberant and art work is often vulnerable.

Education staff attend the security liaison meetings with Michael Seary and the Security staff to ensure that the gallery is used to everyone's best advantage. We greatly appreciate the cooperation of our security colleagues, especially for our Summer School of the Arts program which attracts many hundreds of young enthusiastic participants each year, as well as for the numerous expeditions our weekend art classes make to the various galleries to study the exhibits. Many of us remember that when we were children, the art gallery or museum was an almost magical place full of wonder and fun. We want the next generation to remember our Gallery that way.

Dale Sheppard
Educator
Art Gallery of Nova Scotia

Secure in the Gallery

1 The Gallery and Its Public

Welcome to the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia exhibit *Please Don't Touch the Art.* It consists of a series of fifteen word pictures on the theme of security and access in the public art museum. The material for these brief essays has been collected over the past few years from our own Gallery and from other galleries and museums in eastern Canada and the United States. It is presented as quick sketches, and a few more studied pieces, for example 'AGNS House Style' which provides the foundation of security and accessibility upon which much of this material is based, and 'Commissionaires' Choice', written by Catherine Gray Hughes to describe an exhibit she and the security staff mounted at AGNS in 1998 .

SIX GUARDS AND OTHER STAFF AT THE ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM, TORONTO 1914
PHOTO COURTESY ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM, TORONTO

Everyone who visits a public art gallery knows something of the special feel of these places. The art is valuable and it is protected by security. The essays in this collection explore the tension that can exist between the stimulation of the art in its setting and the measures needed to protect it. They are dedicated to those long suffering guardians, the security staff who spend hour after hour, day after day with the art that we—the viewing public—come to see and enjoy.

The first group of essays—entitled Secure in the Gallery—were written from observations made at art museums in the Maritimes and in New England. The second set—Security in

Practice—are from AGNS publications describing ways in which this Gallery has worked to achieve the twin goals of security and enjoyment—bringing art and people together. The final group—The Accessible Gallery records small incidents that reflect the interplay between the art and its viewers in its setting within the gallery.

This 'exhibit' explores in words how art galleries relate to their public—how they fit into their community to the mutual benefit of each, and with special reference to the ways they balance their custodial role with their public access function.

I wish to thank Tom Smart, Caroline Walker and Barry Henderson whom I interviewed at the Beaverbrook Art Gallery in Fredericton, Andrew Colwell of the New Brunswick Museum and Vera Lagomarsino and Paul Carey at the Portland Museum of Art for taking time from their busy schedules to discuss with me the complex issue of security within the context of art museums. I also appreciate the informative and friendly comments made by members and volunteers at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and the Fogg Museum during my visit to those institutions.

Dale Sheppard, Educator at the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia has been my staunch supporter in this and other projects aimed at bringing art and people together. I thank also her predecessor, Catherine Gray Hughes who has provided a bridge between security and the public by means of the Commissionaires' Choice exhibit which she initiated and co-curated along with the security staff.

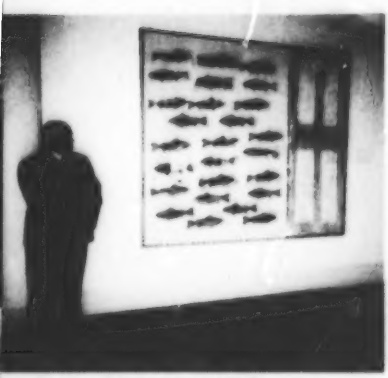
Noreen Smiley has kindly read and gently criticized these word sketches. Infelicities and errors that remain are mine.

Finally I express thanks to the Security staff and to the staff at the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia for their cooperation and courtesy throughout the preparation on this publication.

Most of all, my thanks to Bernard Riordon, AGNS Director, for supporting the idea of creating a security liaison role.

2 Security With A Heartbeat

Since it was Monday, and the Beaverbrook Art Gallery was closed to the public, I went as I had been instructed to the back door, pressed a button high up on a wall, and peered in through a door leading to a stairway. Eventually, after discussion via intercom, I was let in, and introduced to the security head, Barry Henderson. We settled down, in his basement office, to our discussion on the ways security operates at the Beaverbrook.



GUARDING THE ART AT AGNS

Who they are

Security staff may be former military personnel or police. They are people with previous experience working with the public, perhaps as sales persons or in recreation. There are four full time security staff. Additional part time staff is hired as required. They may have an interest in art—but it is not in the job description.

What they do

They recognize that the Gallery exists for its public, and that there is a need for diplomacy. They are required to be present in any gallery with a visitor. (Later, a security person made a point of telling me that I was on my own—he would not stay in the gallery room with me, since I was a guest of the staff). They assist with many other tasks when not needed in the gallery (shoveling snow the day I was there). I asked whether there is ever a conflict between security and other roles. Yes there can be, for example, when the employee has been doing heavy work, and is then required to look neat and calm (There is an impressive list of extra duties in the job description).

What they don't do

The gallery does not have a rule about unaccompanied children. Apparently this has not come up. (It has occasionally been an issue at AGNS where it appears, parents have been known to leave their children while they go shopping). As a rule, they do not comment to the public about the art, but instead they refer those who ask to curatorial or education staff. On the other hand, security staff are encouraged to answer questions such as where the nearest nice restaurant is located. (I remembered visiting the Portland Museum, Maine where at least one security person was eager to tell me the history and gossip around any picture I wanted to know about).

Security staff does not take cameras away from visitors. Photography of the permanent collection is permitted. Security does ask that large parcels be left at the front. (Rules about photography vary greatly from one institution to another. I once had my film confiscated in the Cooper-Hewitt Museum in New York City).

What the head of security does

The director of security is also the librarian and a researcher at the Beaverbrook Art Gallery. He writes the policy the security staff will follow. He takes responsibility for the 'where were you when..' statements that are made after there has been a breach of the collection's integrity. Thus he is the person in the middle between us (security) and them (management, or sometimes the public), and mediates between policies 'coming down' and concerns 'going up'. An example is the concern that newly installed electronic monitors will impinge upon security's job. The middle ground here is that 'we'll do everything we can to ensure security'.

Barry, as head of security, carries out his shift as security officer. This way he becomes closely attuned to security strate-

gies. For example he tries to position himself strategically when talking to a visitor in the gallery, so that he can notice other things happening in an adjacent space.

And what about this policy of pushing a button on an outside wall when the gallery is closed to the public? Even staff cannot come in after hours without making prior arrangements. There is no after hours direct line and if the security person is not in the right place they will not hear the back door bell ringing. I believe there is no direct line into AGNS after hours either, and our door is always locked. But our night time security person is usually at their work station (except during rounds). Security comes down to details.

3 Without a Heartbeat

The New Brunswick Museum is sited in the Market Square shopping mall in Saint John—a building within a building. I presented myself at the front desk, noting as I did so the video monitor screens along shelves beneath the counter, and asked to speak to the head of security. I was introduced to the Controller, Judith Brown, who explained that there was no security as such, and turned me over to Andrew Colwell, Manager of Natural Science Programs, to explain the arrangements around accessibility and security.

Security for Market Square, including the New Brunswick Museum is carried out by Pinkertons of Canada Ltd. This interested me, because I understand that Pinkertons is also the firm that carries out security duties for the National Gallery in Ottawa. The security arrangements for a travelling show to AGNS from the National Gallery were so strict in one case that pencils were not allowed into the gallery, even though all the art in this exhibit was behind glass. In Saint John most of the displays are also behind glass, or are of a scientific or technological nature, rather than being fine art, irreplaceable, one of a kind. Here it is not considered necessary to require security

staff to be in every gallery room whenever there are visitors present. And yes, you can have a pencil in the galleries that contain fine art, including unprotected oil paintings.

Pinkertons people patrol the galleries when large crowds are expected or special security is needed. Staff of the New Brunswick Museum carry intercoms when actively participating as security (eg. as security staff for special exhibits). While I was talking to Andrew, he excused himself to tell a group not to touch a piece of art—even though it looked as though it was meant to be touched. (There was a label advising not to touch).

There are actually even more security hearts beating in the galleries than this. Program staff are expected to spend a part of their work day in the gallery spaces, observing and conversing with the public, acting as hosts, or tour guides, accompanying groups or people like me.

Curators are available by phone and occasionally spend time in the galleries when a visitor requires more information or specific information that public programs may not be able to provide. Curators and program staff work as a team setting up displays in such a way that they are easy for the public to understand, and difficult for them to damage. In the case of paintings, it is planned that security hanging mounts will be installed. Video cameras are mounted above the displays, so if someone is watching the appropriate screen at the front desk, they might observe a person in a gallery removing a picture from the wall and walking to a fire exit with it—at which time an alarm would sound.

The front desk people also explain the do's and don'ts of the gallery. Parcels are left at the front. There is no formal rule about cameras. The use of camcorders or cameras with flashes can be a problem.

Attendance at the New Brunswick Museum has increased dramatically since it moved to its mall location, although it was much less crowded than the rest of the mall the day I was

there. Perhaps the fact there is an admittance fee screens out many individuals for whom the museum is not a destination.

4 The Room at the Top

Returning to Fredericton and the Beaverbrook Art Gallery, I had the opportunity to talk to the curator at that time, Tom Smart. It was a clear crisp wintry day, and his second floor office was bathed in the light of the afternoon sun, shining in a cerulean sky. Here are some of the points we discussed.

The goal is to deploy security so as to increase access—or at least not decrease it—while ensuring the integrity of the art. Electronics can remove the need for a physical presence while increasing actual security. The question becomes how necessary it is to have 'a beating heart' in the room, especially when there is a need to reallocate scarce funds.

CAPTAIN BARRY THORNE
HEAD OF AGNS SECURITY

It might be interesting to replace 'front' and 'back' in an art gallery with a certain degree of integrating art space and work space. The goal here would be for an enhanced experience for the public, reminding them that security staff are not the only ones, aside from visitors, present in the building.

An analogy with a bank can be made. If the only value of art were monetary, it could be kept in the vault, and the gallery's 'stock' could be traded on the exchange. But since the value of art is visual—the enhanced experience for the viewer, other ways of enhancing its value are possible. The staff working in view of the public is one. Opening the vault to visitors, open storage, as at the Museum of Anthropology in Vancouver, would be another.

Banks have changed—no security guards in sight—and they present the perception that they represent the dreams of your future, not merely a repository for your savings, or a place to borrow money.

Desperate times dictate radical solutions. Art galleries are dependent on a public clientele that is currently uneasy about visiting a gallery full of closely guarded pictures and sculptures they may not understand.

Other aspects of security for both banks and galleries do require a more formal 'outside' presence—check points, sign ins, lock ups as protection against the predators who are out there.

It is necessary to find ways to connect with today's public. Otherwise, art galleries and museums will lose out to institutions like shopping malls where the public has lots of parking, can 'hang out' in a setting that is often attractive and is certainly accessible, and can look at, touch, or 'interact with' the many varied products for sale. The public can do this for free, or if they wish to make a purchase, bank machines are available on the premises. And security may well be provided by Pinkertons.

5 Lines of Communication

Besides connecting with the public, it is necessary to have good lines of communication within the gallery itself. One of the ironies for most public galleries is the fact that security staff, who may spend their working life surrounded by fine art, usually have no expertise in the field, while curatorial and program staff, who are experts, spend a comparatively brief proportion of their time actually in the galleries.

So at the Beaverbrook Art Gallery, Caroline Walker, Manager of Education, has been establishing lines of communication between security staff, docents and the public. Security staff are provided with the opportunity to work with the docents, considering together how a group of youngsters can be treated with dignity, but if necessary, firmly. This way the docents and security get to know each other, to compare notes, and thus to better appreciate each other.

In addition, school groups are introduced to security staff during their first tour of the gallery as a way of reinforcing the reasons for security and recognizing the importance of the security role.

For their part, security, since they are being listened to, combine the role of guard with that of host. One member of security has been recognized by the Fredericton Department of Tourism Above and Beyond program on the basis of votes by visitors to the gallery.

As is often the case in complex organizations, chain of command issues do exist. An example is at the front desk where the receptionist, the gallery shop manager and the duty security officer share responsibility, but report to three different people. In practice, since staff cooperate closely, this is not a problem. The three roles exist to encourage a friendly approach to the gallery for the visitor, while gently encouraging their respect for the art, and their support of the gallery through donations and purchases.

Lines of communication include outreach activities as well. The Art Gallery offers classes to students in their own schools, since there is no studio space in the gallery. The children are brought to the gallery for their last class of the session. They learn about 'house rules' and meet the security staff as a part of these tours. They already know that art galleries have exhibits of artists' work and are naturally eager to mount an exhibit of their own art. Access to a public art gallery can be measured by the comfort level of the children who participate in its programs.

6 Security at the Gallery

Following up on the issue of security in New Brunswick, I met with Vera Lagomarsino, Education and Tour Coordinator and Paul Carey, Head of Security at the Portland Museum of Art in Maine. I came armed with a set of questions I

thought would illustrate the duality of the need for security in the gallery and the goal of public access to its collections—the right of quiet enjoyment mentioned in the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia House Style. (p.23)

Are there specific rules for Security staff to enforce?
Yes, I discovered, there are rules for the public about such matters as touching the art and taking photographs. These are available at the front desk. Also there are lockers to be used, free of charge, for oversized bags and backpacks.

And, there is a set of guidelines for the security staff somewhat similar to the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia House Style. Included are such items as:

'a firm but courteous manner'

'never discuss or comment on the art'

'conversations on radios to be kept to business'

Through personal observation I later noted that the rule about commenting on the art is not always followed by every Security Officer.

Do the Security staff receive specific training for their job?
According to Paul Carey, there is no formal training. Applicants need a high school diploma and must pass an interview. A printed set of duties is provided, there are weekly meetings of section heads that might include security issues, and there is a docent newsletter that considers security matters such as dealing with dissatisfied visitors—Security is called upon to do this—or deciding if a backpack is too big and should be put into a locker—Security has the final say.

ON GUARD IN THE GALLERIES

There is no dress code for security staff, no badge, no 'wad of keys', no 'we/they' distinction between Security and the public.

Where judgement is required are guidelines given?
I asked Paul this question. He said no—instead he provides a backup system through which staff call the security office for assistance. The backup might involve giving instructions by phone, sending another security person or other staff member to assist, or in extreme cases, phoning the police.

After hours off site security assistance is available to security staff by means of an automatic alarm system to an outside security firm. For special events at the gallery, off duty police officers are employed as backup security.

Are there ever tensions between the requirement for security and the need for accessibility by the public? How are these cases handled?
Yes, sometimes the need for security conflicts with the total freedom some members of the public might prefer. On one occasion for example, some boys took the liberty of covering the walls of the mens washroom with graffiti. Graffiti is a form of artistic expression, they may have thought. The deed was discovered while the perpetrators were still in the gallery, so they were caught. It was agreed by the school they had come from, the Gallery, and the boys themselves that they should return later and clean up the graffiti. This was done. Paul advises that the best idea is to clean up at the earliest opportunity.

Another potential source for tension is between security and the curatorial staff. According to Vera, curators may not wish to use stanchions in front of exhibits because they interfere with the integrity of the art. Security then must be particularly watchful that the art is not harmed. Or, in the temporary exhibition at Portland, when I was there, the labels

were printed on small dark green cards to match the wall colour. This way they do not detract from the art, but from a security standpoint, the public has to get very close to the paintings to be able to read the labels. So they ask the security person what the cards say.

Does the Security staff know anything about art?
Some of them do, and they do learn about the exhibits by listening to the docents introducing the art to school groups or the public. And some security people have been employed by the gallery for many years and know the collection very well. But Security staff is not hired for their knowledge of or interest in art. They are asked in the guidelines not to comment on the art. On the other hand, one of their duties according to the guidelines is to familiarize themselves 'with the objects you are responsible for'.

7 Visiting the Gallery

Having discussed the dual role of security and accessibility in detail with the Security staff at AGNS, and having explored how it works in practice at several other galleries, it seemed appropriate to simply visit an art museum and observe how smoothly the security arrangements work. Presumably visitors should not need to worry about security, so the question to explore was: do I feel comfortable and welcome here? 'Here' in this case was the Boston Museum of Fine Arts (with a side trip later to the Fogg Art Museum at Harvard). Presenting myself at the front desk at the BFA I was given a ticket to present each time I went past one of the entry points to the gallery collections from the bookstore, the cafeteria or upon re entering the

STUDENTS OBSERVING, BUT NOT TOUCHING THE SCULPTURE AT THE BOSTON MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS

building during the course of the day. Showing my ticket to the security person, I entered the gallery. Remembering the needs of security, I asked an official if you can take pictures in the Gallery, and yes, you can, but no flash, and only the permanent collection. Later in the week, when I visited the Fogg Museums at Harvard University, I was accosted for traveling the Gallery without a license to photograph. I returned to the front desk to receive formal permission to photograph art in the permanent collection only. I was also told at this time that I must check my 'bag'—the soft brief case I had carried around with me for two days at the BFA.

Back at the BFA I was told that ninety percent of the items on display belong to the permanent collections. "The rest," my informant told me, "is temporary exhibits, like that Rorschach painting at the end of the hall." Of course I checked this particular picture. It was an acrylic yarn work by Rosemarie Trocke and indeed she had used a detail from a Rorschach test as inspiration for the art. I went back to compliment my informant on reading the extensive labels beside the paintings, and found out that he was not a security person. They are the ones wearing black uniforms. He was a visitor's advisor. He had worked in financial management until his retirement two years ago and was now employed full time to answer visitors' questions, to back up security, and in general to bring additional experience to the floor of the Art Gallery.

I found out later that visitor's advisors are often stationed at the entrance to temporary exhibits where they count the number of admissions and get a measure of the public response to the show. They also notice, for example, that children especially are very interested in ancient Egyptian art but not so much in the Asian collections. And they answer questions like, "how did they get all those paintings onto the ceiling?" in reference to John Singer Sargent's 1916 murals.

I asked my advisor why some people wear red tags when I was carrying a white ticket to show I had paid. It turns out that members of the BFA did not enjoy being asked if they had paid whenever they re entered the collections so the plastic tags identify members. Employees of the art gallery also wear plastic identification cards and I now noticed that visitor's advisors wore a pin identifying their role.

One of my trips outside the gallery areas was to the cafeteria. A sign attached to the wall outside the entrance stated: TEACHERS AND CHAPERONES PLEASE NOTE: SCHOOL GROUPS ARE NOT PERMITTED IN THE CAFETERIA. THANK YOU FOR HELPING US ENFORCE THIS POLICY.

A group of about fifteen youngsters and two chaperones was approaching the school group entrance to the education wing. Noting the identification tags worn by the chaperones I asked one of them about their role and their relationship to the gallery. They are responsible for ensuring the integrity of the art by close supervision of the children. The chaperones are parents or teachers of self tour or docent led groups.

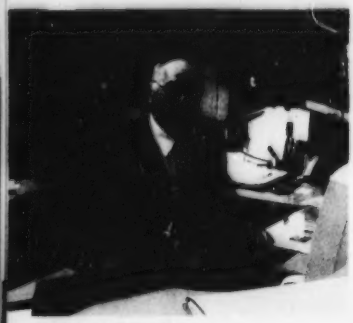
And where do the children eat? I checked at the cafeteria and found out that they can eat there if they are small groups of twelve to fifteen. "They just line up one behind the other," said my informant. Large groups need to make prior arrangements.

To find out more about the dynamics of self supervised tour groups I went to the Egyptian galleries. It seemed like a natural place to find children and indeed there were at least three groups along with their chaperones looking at the Egyptian art or filling out questionnaires about it. I heard one youngster explain to his friend, "Mummies are dead people".

Security was at work here. I saw a child take a flash picture—and another. A security person moved toward the student, but a teacher got there first and explained to him—in Spanish—why this is never done.

At this point I noticed that very little of the art at the BFA is vulnerable to damage. Even oil paintings of significant value are behind glass and most framed art is screwed to the wall. Valuable sculptures are enclosed in plastic cases. There are exceptions.

"My kids over here," said one of the chaperones, "against the wall." How many students does she supervise? I wondered. "There are five kids to a team," she explained.



CAN I HELP YOU?

I counted approximately fifty children in the room, and at least eight adults—chaperones and the general public. The classes did seem to be interested in the art but they were also excited and the noise level was getting quite high. The 'quiet enjoyment' standard in the AGNS House Style came to mind. At this moment a security person came very purposefully into the gallery waving his arms as if to smooth down the talking and hissing "shh, SHH". The classes began drifting out of the gallery shepherded by their chaperones. "Is it lunch time yet?" I could hear one of the kids asking.

8 Security Talk Back

The Art Gallery of Nova Scotia has a book of loose leaf pages in many gallery rooms where visitors can write their comments about art or their feelings about the Gallery generally. Security staff (or anyone else) can read these commentaries and thus gain insights about how the art is received by the visitors. The public seem to enjoy writing their comments and the Gallery receives volumes of Talk Back comments. One Talk Back commentator noted that we had run out of pages and he had to write on the back of someone else's comments.

The Talk Back critics are not afraid to state their ideas forcefully. Here is an example from the AGNS folk art gallery

that became a case study for a Security Liaison meeting: *Folk art is meant to be touched and felt and used. It should be appreciated for its hand made tactile qualities. If it is placed in a gallery, that changes the context. However the viewer is entitled to see it in a gallery but they should be allowed to touch it and experience it to its fullest potential.* Another person simply wrote: *we should be able to touch stuff and don't be so grumpy!*

In discussion the security staff who dealt with this case raised these points:

- the Talk Back was made by a school student who was part of a self conducted tour
- the group of fifteen to twenty students had come 'on the spur of the moment', on a no entrance fee day, and had ignored the 'no touch' policy; they rocked a rocking chair, felt the paintings, tried to open the Maud Lewis door (a decoratively painted door by this celebrated folk artist) and responded with anger when asked not to
- their teacher came later and apparently explained that her students knew how to act in an art gallery

The Security staff felt the students did not seem to believe that they needed to follow security guidelines in the case of folk art. They wondered whether students are taught this, whether there should be different rules for folk art, whether students should follow the same guidelines as the general public. They thought about how to deal with such situations without seeming grumpy.

Here's another Talk Back example illustrating ways the public responds to our 'no touch' policy:

Example one - *Enjoyed the exhibit although the visit was marred by someone playing a large metal instrument. Definitely took away from the enjoyment. Maybe next year, no*

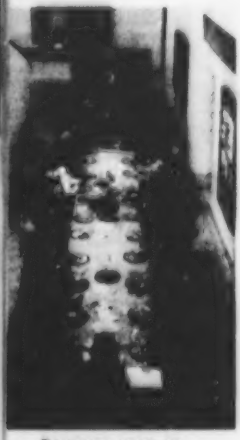
instruments? And perhaps have the video installations apart from each other so each can be enjoyed in peace.
Example two - *Enjoyed playing the instrument. This isn't a morgue. Let's have more instruments. He (the artist) built it to be played and enjoyed. Music is art as well. I'd like to see a few children tumbling over the carpet as well. Artists are the athletes of the spirit. Some enjoyment please.*

This particular instrument was a part of the exhibit and could be touched or played, although this was not made crystal clear to the viewers of the exhibit. And the sound might not have been appreciated by the visitor who wrote:

The silence of art is what amazes me most. So many thoughts and feelings but no real explanation. Its great. Makes you appreciate your own thoughts in comparison to the artists. This is a nice place.

9 Art As A Public Resource

Unless art is perceived to have some lasting value, it will not be conserved. Unless it is accessible, it will not be seen as having a use.



BANQUET HELD IN A GALLERY SPACE AT AGNS

So Art Galleries need to ensure—through public education—that art enhances life (is 'fun' at the level of children), so it should be funded (through membership in the gallery, and by various other means), and it will be treasured (protected, preserved, secure).

The issue is that the arts are not currently treasured in general—not in the school system, not in the workplace, not as a part of our daily lives, not by the population in general who may feel uneasy or skeptical in front of art which is unusual or radical.

Access means enjoyment and security means preservation for others to enjoy. Art is like the environment in this way. It is 'human nature'. We need to savour it, value it and save it.

Security in Practice

10 Art Gallery of Nova Scotia House Style

Introduction

The Mission Statement of the AGNS asserts:
The Mission of AGNS is to serve the public by bringing the visual arts and people together in an environment which encourages exploration, dialogue and enjoyment.

The purpose of the AGNS House Style is to establish a set of general guidelines conducive to an atmosphere of dialogue and enjoyment. The AGNS Post Orders, suppled to Security, provide a comprehensive listing of rules. The House Style Guidelines deal with areas where judgment rather than regulation comes into play.

The material in this document was developed from a series of workshops held by the Security staff in November/December 1994 (revised 2001). The guidelines suggested here are to be considered provisional, open to negotiation and change as issues are raised, discussed and resolved.

It is recognized that no set of guidelines will solve all the problems and result in perfect harmony. This is why it is necessary to consider and update these ideas on a regular basis.

Benchmark Guideline

"Security is a concern for all—quiet enjoyment is a right for all." This is the basic standard against which to measure the elements of the House Style. Judgments must recognize the shared need to safeguard the collections and the welfare of visitors to the Gallery. They must ensure that those who visit and work at AGNS are in a setting which, to the greatest extent possible, is harmonious, pleasant and stimulating.

Mutual Resposibility

The specific security responsibilities of the Security staff are stated in their Post Orders and Procedures. Beyond this set of specific rules mutual responsibility for security requires:

- that all staff and volunteers be aware of the regulations regarding such items as touching art work, food, drink and gum, checking knapsacks, running, photography, smoking
- that discussion occur between the appropriate section head and the head of security in the case of possible exceptions or conflicts

Quiet Enjoyment

Responsibility of Security Staff for quiet enjoyment is also specifically mentioned in the Post Orders. Quiet enjoyment also requires judgment on the part of the Security Staff:

- remaining watchful without seeming to "hover"
- intervening appropriately where relatively minor security breaches occur
- handling difficult cases with a satisfactory mix of firmness and emotional neutrality

The "quiet enjoyment" guideline requires confrontation to be replaced with facilitation. This includes:

- explanation of why the rule is there
- listening to the visitor's viewpoint
- finding a solution that preserves the visitor's dignity
- knowing when and how to call for help

Continual Communication

The twin goals of security and enjoyment will be achieved only in a climate of continued open discussion. This involves:

- raising issues that affect security or the right of enjoyment, and discussing them in order to find a satisfactory solution
- adopting an action plan for a new procedure or policy
- circulating notice of the change to all concerned

House Style For Everyone

Probably all institutions have their own behavioural norms:

- when to clap in a concert hall
- how loud to talk in a library
- which way to run on an indoor track
- where to line up for check out at a supermarket

These norms are known by most people using the institution, but they are not necessarily always honoured. AGNS has its set of rules. They are posted. Security, as graciously as possible ensures that they are followed. Generally, everyone who uses the Gallery accepts and follows the rules. There are exceptions—the media are sometimes exempted from the photography rule, for example. So that Security's authority is not compromised, exceptions need to be identified and exceptional procedures agreed upon and communicated appropriately.

Summary

House Style AGNS is an institution where:

- security is a concern for all
- quiet enjoyment is a right of all
- the responsibility for security is shared by all

- the assurance of enjoyment is supported by an approach that is facilitative and not confrontational
- the goals of security and enjoyment are facilitated by a climate that encourages continual communication and open discussion
- the house rules are generally for everyone—where there are exceptions, these are identified and documented

11 Bringing Security and People Together

Noise and running children; adults without their stickers; students with knapsacks slung over their shoulders; people touching paintings—this is the stuff of security. The need to safeguard the Gallery collections and the welfare of visitors to the Gallery and to ensure that those who visit and work at AGNS are in a setting which is harmonious and pleasant—this is their mission.

To address ongoing concerns in the spirit of 'House Style,' meetings have been held with Security three to four times annually since 1995. Issues have been raised, frustrations expressed, suggestions have been made, solutions found, and inevitably, some ongoing concerns have continued going on. The issues raised might be concerns security staff themselves have, they might be introduced by the Director, Bernard Riordon, or other staff members, they might arise from events outside the art gallery milieu. They might be resolved in one meeting, they might be ongoing.

Following are examples of issues, large and small, discussed by Security personnel and representatives from the AGNS staff at the meetings over the past five years.

Briefings for Events

Briefings involving Security have been carried out on a formal or a casual basis over the years. They deal with everything from cases where art on display might be vulnerable (a sculp-

ture on a pedestal near a door) to the appropriate level of lighting for a specific exhibit. But in the pressure to meet the event deadlines, sometimes communication has not occurred or has come too late for Security to act upon. So the liaison meetings attempt to ensure, especially in the case of large scale events with a strong security component such at the annual Family Weekend or the Summer School of the Arts, that the briefings are complete and timely.

Signage

Security staff hears from the public or observes cases where our signage inside or outside the Gallery could be more effective. Symbols indicating the location of wheelchair accessible washrooms is an example. Recommendations for changes to our leaflets or to the placement, size, wording or numbering of signs have been made over the years.

Access

During the planning leading to the Phase Two expansion of the Gallery in 1999, Security was invited through the security liaison workshops to give their recommendations relating to traffic flow and security. What would be the impact of two entrances, how to sort out traffic flow between gallery exhibit space and services such as the Cheapside Café, the Art Sales and Rental Gallery, the Gallery Shop, and the Education Centre.

A LIGHTER MOMENT AT THE AGNS GALLERY SHOP

Open Mondays

Observation by Security staff has shown that numbers of people would come to AGNS on Mondays if we were open. As a result of this liaison meeting discussion, the Gallery was opened on Mondays last summer, providing tourists and local visitors to the Gallery an extra opportunity to enjoy the exhibits.

Accounting for Everyone

It is important for security and for safety in case of an emergency such as a fire that everyone in the Art Gallery at any one time can be accounted for. People come to the Gallery for a number of different reasons. Our facilities are used for outside meetings and receptions, school classes, meetings with members of the AGNS staff, board meetings, our own studio education program. Besides regular visitors to the Gallery, volunteers and casual staff, trades people, and media people may be in the Gallery. Many events or activities occur when the gallery spaces are closed. At all times Security needs to know who is where and why. The ways of doing this are explored at the security liaison meetings.

Further insight into the issues of security is brought to its meetings as a result of visits to other similar institutions. The system of identification stickers and cards used at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts has been compared with the needs at AGNS, for example. The procedures used by Security staff at the Beaverbrook Art Gallery in Fredericton, to oversee collections on exhibit in the galleries without seeming to "hover" around the visitors has provided another topic for discussion.

The exploration of issues such as these help to provide ways to smooth the contact between Security and the public, to ensure that the integrity of the Gallery is not compromised and that the visitors do feel welcome and comfortable during their visits.

Michael Seary
Art Gallery of Nova Scotia Journal
Vol 17/2

12 Commissionaires' Choice

Throughout the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia there are a number of people who spend a great deal of time with the works of art, on a day to day by day basis. These people walk around the Gallery spaces interacting with both the art works and the general public. Are they curators or educators? No, they are members of Canadian Corps of Commissionaires—the security staff. These dedicated people have much in common with some of our visitors. Many of the commissionaires come to the Gallery with little or no formal training or experience with art. Visitors may identify with security staff as one of "them". The public often share their comments and invite insights from the commissionaires. When I have asked a commissionaire his/her opinion about a particular work they have been frank, thoughtful, and interested, often sharing their personal favourites with me. Not only will they tell me which is their favourite, but they tell me why. This expression of ideas is important. The exhibition takes the opportunity to share these conversations with the public.

GENTLY WATCHFUL

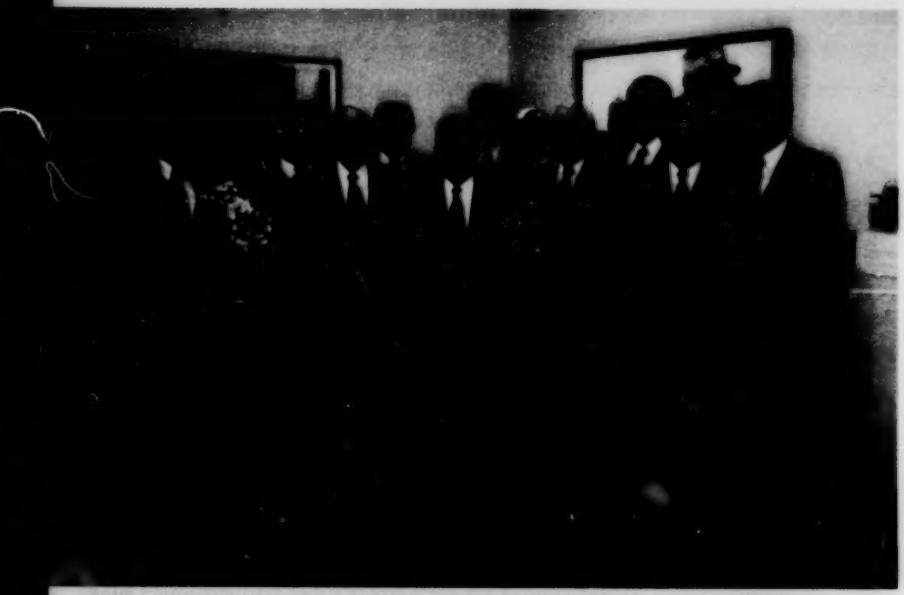
Some members of the public, however, see a security person as someone who inhibits rather than enhances a gallery or museum experience. Sad but true, it is an opinion often heard. There is a delicate balance between the experience of the visitor and the protection of the art works. This balance varies greatly in the world-wide context of galleries and museums. It is our hope, that through this exhibition, the public will have a greater understanding of the commissionaires' role in our Gallery.

This exhibition will highlight works from the permanent collection, chosen by the commissionaires. They have been asked over the past few months to keep track of works that they enjoy, that they wish to gain more information about, or

that they strongly dislike. From these lists an exhibition has unfolded, with written reflections by the commissionaires, and an opportunity for visitor activity and feedback. This project offers a venue for the commissionaires to share their insights with visitors, and a way to explore the roles curators and educators play in the Gallery, through hands-on experience.

Several commissionaires have given many years of service to the Gallery and a number will be retiring in the next year. On this occasion we celebrate the splendid contribution the Commissionaires have made to the Gallery and the community. It is our wish that you will join Gallery staff to share this enriching experience

Catherine Gray Hughes
Art Gallery of Nova Scotia Journal
Vol 15/2



AGNS Commissionaires group portrait for the Commissionaire's Choice exhibition

The Accessible Gallery

13 Impressions

We were spending a Sunday afternoon at the Art Gallery, looking at the paintings of Helen McNicol, the early twentieth century Canadian Impressionist painter. I noticed one of the security guards looking at us. "Hmm, those security guards really do hover," I thought. Later I saw two of the Security staff in deep conversation, punctuated by glances in our direction. Then one of them turned and walked decisively toward us. "Maybe we shouldn't have been looking at that painting." The irrational thought flashed through my mind. "I noticed you studying the garden painting on the north wall. My colleague and I were wondering, did you notice anything strange about it?" "Uh, no," I faltered. "Why?" "Well," said the guard, seizing the opportunity. We were reading the Talk Back comments by viewers and one person had written that the garden table legs were wrong. We checked, and it looks as though one of them is missing alright. Indeed the table did look quite rickety in the manner garden tables always seem to be. "Quite right," said I, "Perhaps since this is Impressionist art the artist was mostly trying for the effect of dappled sunlight in the garden. What do you think?" What impressed me was the careful attention our Security staff pays to the art.

RECEPTION AT AGNS—
A CHALLENGE FOR SECURITY. CAN YOU FIND THE GUARD?

14 Feeling Secure

"You know," she said, "I'm glad that we have security guards." "How so?" said I. "I was at my work station today and there was a group of people standing around, not saying anything even when I asked if I could help them. They were not looking at the art and they made me uneasy. They just didn't seem right." "And then one of the security guys came along. Didn't say anything either, he just was there." "He made me feel safe."

15 Beginning in Art

Little children all in a row, and each about three feet high, file into Dalhousie Art Gallery, along with their three adult guides. In small groups they march up to the pictures and look at them solemnly. Some of the boys pull their jackets over their heads like capes. A little girl approaches a work of art by slow deliberate steps from the far wall, coming closer, closer until she is right there in front of the picture and then she moves her nose to within one inch of the middle of the art. But she does not touch.

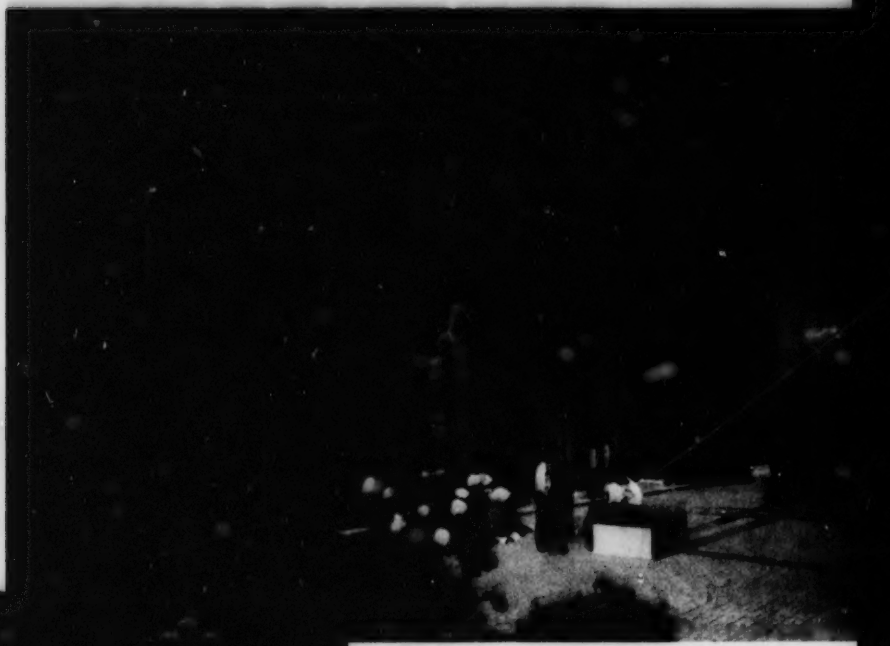
Their keepers smile benignly. No sound is made by any child. Except, when it is time to leave and the teacher says, "What do you say to the man?" There is a long pause while three small boys ponder the question. Finally light dawns for one young fellow. "Thank you?" he asks.

From different parts of the room, as though pulled by an invisible thread, the children gravitate silently toward the door. Except one little girl, who galumphs across the gallery room hopping like a horse, flopping her arms like a grounded bird and loudly whispering "whoop...whoop...whoop" with each hop.

The last one to leave is a boy even smaller than the others who walks very lightly for fear perhaps that his steps will harm a painting and who holds his index finger against his lips in the 'shhh' position.

They do not see the soft smiles their presence has brought to the few adults who were in the gallery. Later the children may tell their parents what they did this day. They went to the Art Gallery. It was wonderful.

AGNS Gallery South



AGNS Gallery North. Cleaned and refurbished

When you are in an art gallery admiring the paintings do you ever feel you are being watched? You are. This brief publication tells about the security personnel who watch you and the Gallery staff who work to ensure that your experience as a visitor will nevertheless be a happy one.

The author, in his capacity of Security Liaison Officer for the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, has for the past eight years studied the complex relationship amongst security personnel, art gallery staff and the visitors who come to enjoy the gallery collections and services. He presents his observations in a series of fifteen 'word sketches' designed – like paintings on the wall – to delight and inform. He hopes his word art will touch the reader.

Michael Seary is a teacher, artist and writer living in Halifax. As a result of a lifetime of experience of schools, galleries and museums, government bureaucracies and non profit agencies he has come to have a keen interest in how institutions work for their publics. He also likes walking in beautiful Point Pleasant Park and looking out to sea.

AGNS

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